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ABSTRACT

In July, 1989, the New York State Board of Regents approved this policy paper, with recommended actions to be accomplished during the next 5 years for the following policies: (1) existing resources will be better coordinated and used for at-risk youth; (2) at least 50 percent of any new state resources for elementary and secondary education will be used to help schools meet these students' needs; (3) educational programs, services, and staff must respect and represent the cultural, racial, social, economic, and language background of the students served; and (4) schools, school districts, students, and the state education department will be held accountable for the achievement of at-risk youth. The Regents will pursue the recommended actions through their legislative program, their State Aid to the Schools proposal, and state operating and local assistance funds. While this policy paper cannot resolve all issues affecting at-risk individuals, it is intended to address the needs of a majority of these youth. All students shall complete a quality secondary school program and successfully assume roles as self-sufficient adults in society. No performance gap attibutable to the instructional program should exist between any socioeconomic or racial subgroups. Equity and excellence must guide New York State's school mission for all pupils. Rather than emphasize remedial programs, recommendations attempt to address students' developmental needs and focus on early childhood programs, alternative high school completion approaches, and effective procedures for identifying and assessing at-risk students. (MLH)

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YOUTH PLACED AT-RISK

A Statement of Policy and Recommended Action for Educating Children and Youth Placed At-Risk

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July 1989

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EA 021 691

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FOREWORD

At its July meeting, the Board of Regents approved the attached Policy Paper on Educating Children and Youth Placed At-Risk. The Policy Paper includes recommended actions to be accomplished within the next five years for the following policies:

> Existing resources will be better coordinated and used for youth placed at-risk.
>
> At least 50 percent of any new State resources for elementary and secondary education will be targeted towards enabling schools to meet the needs of youth placed at-risk.
>
> Educational programs, services and staff must respect and represent the cultural, racial, social, economic and language background of the students served.
>
> Schools, school districts, students and the State Education Department will be held accountable at the level of their responsibility for the achievement of youth placed at-risk.

The Regents will pursue the recommended actions through their legislative program, their State Aid to the Schools proposal, and State Operating and local assistance funds requested as part of the Department's budget.

While it is not suggested that the Policy Paper on Educating Children and Youth Placed At-Risk will lead to the resolution of all issues that affect each individual placed at-risk, it is intended to be a major step in addressing the needs of the majority of these children and youth. The central theme of the Paper is that all students shall complete a quality secondary school program and successfully assume roles as self-sufficient adults in society. We must ensure that no performance gap exists between any subgroup, especially between those of high and low socioeconomic status and between those of different ethnic backgrounds, which may be attributable to the instructional program, instruction or lack of support services. The Board of Regents maintains that equity and excellence must guide the mission of the schools in New York State for all pupils.

Your comments on the Policy Paper are welcome. If you have any questions, please direct correspondence to one of the offices identified below:

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State Education Department
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Policy Paper
on
Recommended Policies and Actions for
Educating Children and Youth Placed At-Risk

"Our nation is at risk of starting the twenty-first century with one in every four youngsters failing to complete the essentials of learning ...Above all we must make a commitment of **will** to a nationwide goal of high school graduation for virtually all students. Each person, with the rare exceptions of some who have severe disabilities, has the capacity to meet the standards for a high school diploma. Because different individuals learn in different ways, how students are successfully taught should vary; what each student learns, however, must include a challenging and common curriculum."[1] This paper has been prepared to express the commitment of the Board of Regents to resolve the critical problem of educating children and youth placed at-risk in New York State.

The paper draws on information and analyses found in several recent reports to the Commissioner and Board of Regents including that of the Commissioner's Task Force on Children and Youth At-Risk; the Regents Policy Paper on Middle Level Education; the Regents Panel on Learning Styles; the Commissioner's Task Force on Second Language Requirements; a draft Regents Policy Statement on the Mission and Role of BOCES in Providing Occupational and Continuing Education; an SED publication entitled, Board of Regents and State Education Department Efforts to Improve New York City Public Schools 1977-1988; a report of the Educational Priorities Panel; the Regents Policy Paper and Proposed Action for Bilingual Education; an SED Report to the Regents on Compensatory Education; SED planning and policy guidelines on Alcohol/Drug Free Schools in New York State; the Excellence and Accountability Program; an SED report to the Regents entitled, What the State Education Department Will Do to Help Secure Children's Educational Rights in the New York City Public Schools; the report of the Commissioner's Task Force on the Teaching Profession; and the Regents Working Paper on Increasing High School Completion Rates.

The work which has been done by the various groups responsible for the reports provides a firm base of information on which to build the Department's comprehensive plan for educating children and youth placed at-risk. It is not suggested that this paper will lead to the resolution of all issues that affect each individual placed at-risk; however, it is intended to be a major step in addressing the needs of the majority of these children and youth.

1 School Success for Students At Risk - Analysis and Recommendations of the Council of Chief State School Officers, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, Orlando, Florida, 1988. Page 297-298.

This paper establishes a central theme and priorities for directing future initiatives regarding the needs of children and youth placed at-risk in New York State. It also contains specific policy statements as well as a series of recommended actions to be taken.

The central theme of this paper is that:

> **"ALL STUDENTS SHALL COMPLETE A QUALITY SECONDARY SCHOOL PROGRAM AND SUCCESSFULLY ASSUME ROLES AS SELF-SUFFICIENT ADULTS IN SOCIETY."**

This educational experience should ensure that students are provided with the necessary knowledge, appreciations, skills, understanding, attitudes and values to assume adult roles. For some students, this means successful participation in postsecondary institutions, while for others it may mean participating successfully in meaningful employment. The same goals will be held for all students in the State, including those with handicapping conditions. However, for those students who are severely disabled, it may mean a successful transition to the adult service system.

For the purposes of this paper, the term "all students" shall include all children in New York State regardless of their ethnic, linguistic or cultural heritage, economic status, abilities or disabilities, English language proficiency, personal problems or family background. The term "youth placed at-risk" refers to those students whose social, economic or personal circumstances are not supportive of successful schooling. While all communities have youth who live in conditions that place them at-risk, such youth are most often in communities with limited resources, inadequate schools, struggling families and deteriorating infrastructure conditions. They are at-risk of not completing high school and, as a result, will be denied future opportunities for full participation in and contribution to the economic, social, cultural and civic life of their communities.

Undergirding the central theme of this paper, two critical premises guide our efforts:

- **ALL STUDENTS MUST HAVE ACCESS TO AND PARTICIPATE IN A QUALITY EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE.**

- **GIVEN A QUALITY EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE, ALL STUDENTS WILL ACHIEVE.**

These premises focus our attention on the success of **all** students. We must ensure that no performance gap exists between students of any subgroup, especially between those of high and low socioeconomic status and between those of different ethnic backgrounds,

which may be attributable to the instructional program, instruction or lack of support services. These underlying premises are consistent with the expectations that the Board of Regents has for all children and youth in New York State. These expectations are detailed in the Regents 1984 statement which defines the specific goals to be achieved by all students in order to successfully complete a high school program and make the transition to adult life experiences.

We live in a changing world, and we prepare our children for an unseen future. If they are to live well in that distant, different time, they must begin life in the conditions which make healthy growth and development possible. They must experience the security which permits acceptance of change, the pride of self which permits tolerance of others, and the growing competence which leads to effective action in the adult world. They must know that they count as individuals, but that they share a common destiny with others and have a responsibility for the welfare of others as well as their own. Without the proper conditions, these and other desirable qualities cannot be attained.

The Board of Regents maintains that equity and excellence must guide the mission of the schools in New York State for all pupils. They are especially committed to the support of individuals and groups that have been underserved or have not benefited from educational services.

Therefore the Regents assert their intention to pursue these conditions for all the children of our State. Although the Regents Bill of Rights for Children confers no actual rights or entitlements, it does reflect the policy goals of the Board. Through their legislative program, through regulatory action, and through collaborative effort with people and institutions throughout the State, the Regents will attempt to secure these rights for all the children of the State of New York. This policy paper on youth placed at-risk further articulates this notion.

Unfortunately present conditions for youth do not match these desired and necessary conditions. The data which have been collected by the Department to evaluate the implementation of the Regents Action Plan and the Chapter 655 Report clearly indicate that certain populations of students who are from lower socioeconomic and minority backgrounds are not meeting with the same success rates as other groups of students. The disparity in educational experience between majority and minority children, children from high and low income families, and disabled and non-disabled children must not continue.

Extensive research indicates a positive correlation between parental involvement and student achievement. Families provide the most important learning environment of all. Parents who demonstrate a strong interest in their children's schooling promote the development of attitudes that are paramount to achievement. Opportunities that promote

a partnership between the school and parent must be provided. It is also important for the community to have high expectations and aspirations for its youth.

Each educational program in New York State should have a clear statement of learning outcomes that is based upon State-developed syllabi and reflects the Regents goals for elementary and secondary education. These outcomes should be communicated to students, school staff and parents. The progress of individual students should be monitored frequently and adjustments made to the student's program based on this information. Pupil achievement data and other factors should be used for the allocation of resources and for determining staff development programs particularly at the school building, and also at the district and regional levels.

Recommended Policies and Actions

The purpose of the following section is to provide a series of recommended policies and actions which will direct our attention to the educational needs of children and youth placed at-risk in New York State. No single set of activities can provide a complete response to the myriad of complex problems impacting children and youth who have been placed at-risk. However, the proposed policies and actions to be accomplished over the next five years are fundamental and essential in our efforts to improve the educational outcomes for such students. Rather than emphasize remedial programs, they attempt to address the developmental needs of students with particular attention given to early childhood education programs, alternative approaches to completing high school and effective procedures for the early and accurate assessment of youth placed at-risk. Adoption of this policy paper will establish an order of priority (prevention, intervention, retrieval) in responding to the problems facing youth placed at risk. The recommended actions to be accomplished over the next five years are proposed based on the assumption that federal resources will continue at the present level with appropriate inflationary increases and State resources will be continued.

Policy A - **IT SHALL BE THE POLICY OF THE REGENTS THAT EXISTING RESOURCES BE BETTER COORDINATED AND USED FOR YOUTH PLACED AT-RISK.**

Recommended actions to be accomplished within the next five years:

1. Develop a comprehensive data base for all grant programs and ensure that categorical and grant funds for school improvement and youths placed at-risk are coordinated at the State and local levels, allocated to schools with the highest concentrations of youth placed at-risk, and used in a timely manner by local districts.

   Rationale - There are approximately 30 federal and State categorical and grant programs at the State Education Department which focus on school improvement and youth placed at-risk. Previously, there was little communication between and among State level program offices, and little effort at the local level to coordinate the funds across the many grant programs, even though they all focus on school improvement and youth placed at-risk. This activity will ensure that districts apply for and use funds on time, coordinate the money locally to achieve the most desired benefits for the youth placed at-risk population, and track the funds for management and decision-making purposes at the State Education Agency (SEA). In addition, a unified application will further encourage SEA and local district planning and result in the coordinated use of funds.

2. As in the case of middle level education, develop Regents policy papers for each of the remaining areas of elementary and secondary education and implement a Challenge for Excellence Program in each area.

   Rationale - In districts where dropping out is often the rule rather than the exception, more fundamental and systematic change is required. Within the schooling system, a variety of meaningful and challenging learning paths to high school graduation must be created so that all students may pursue a course of study which is responsive to their interests, skills and needs.

   The development of Regents policy papers for early childhood, intermediate grades and high school education that focus on student outcomes will increase the likelihood of student high school completion by providing a vehicle for restructuring schools and programs for youth placed at-risk.

3. Through a Challenge for Excellence Program at each level of elementary and secondary education, identify and/or establish 50 model schools serving high concentrations of youth placed at-risk to demonstrate how reorganizing and/or restructuring the schooling experience can better serve the needs of youth placed at-risk.

   Rationale - Traditional programs and practices in elementary, middle and high schools were not designed to meet the needs of youth placed at-risk and, as a consequence, have been ineffective in meeting their needs. Numerous reports and studies have recommended that schools serving high concentrations of youth placed at-risk must be restructured to be more responsive to the needs of such students. A number of schools have undertaken successful efforts to restructure or reorganize certain programs, practices and processes which have resulted in their moving from ineffective to effective schools. Such schools should be identified and used as models to assist in the development of successful practices and to assist other schools serving high concentrations of youth placed at-risk. Special attention will be given to identifying schools that make up an elementary to secondary feeder system.

4. Focus technical assistance and monitoring efforts on schools with high concentrations of youth placed at-risk.

   Rationale - The Department's experience with the Resource Allocation Program and the Comprehensive School Improvement Planning Process suggests that conditions in low performing schools can be improved when given appropriate assistance. The Department should take a leadership role in ensuring, through its technical assistance and monitoring efforts, that existing resources are targeted to schools with high concentrations of youth placed at-risk and that available resources are used effectively.

5. Develop a universal State definition of the conditions that place youth at-risk and implement a comprehensive interagency plan for services to youth placed at-risk.

   Rationale - Currently, there are several policy statements from various commissions and task forces concerning the problems of youth placed at-risk, but no over-arching State policy that delineates each

agency's role in addressing the conditions that placed youth at-risk actually exists. The Governor's Decade of the Child campaign is a positive step in this direction which could be reinforced by a comprehensive interagency plan for services to youth placed at-risk. Such services would relate to health education, nutrition, drug abuse prevention, family life education, etc.

As the Board of Regents promotes the concept of schools as a hub for community services (community schools), it must be recognized that this approach requires a fundamental change of practice within the educational system. Local interagency collaboration is essential to this approach. By working with agencies at the State level to develop and implement a comprehensive plan, the Department would, in fact, be modeling the behavior which would be expected of local officials. Anticipated outcomes related to this action would include improved communication and sharing of information, increased cost effectiveness of resources and expanded services for youth placed at-risk.

Policy B - **IT SHALL BE THE POLICY OF THE REGENTS TO TARGET AT LEAST 50 PERCENT OF ANY NEW STATE RESOURCES FOR ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION ON PROGRAMS THAT ENABLE SCHOOLS TO MEET THE NEEDS OF YOUTH PLACED AT-RISK.**

Recommended actions to be accomplished within the next five years:

1. Revise formulas providing State aid to education to ensure that funds are adequately and fairly distributed to schools based upon district or pupil needs, especially for districts with fiscal distress and high concentrations of youth placed at-risk.

   Rationale - Recent research by the Department adequately displays the need for both adjustments to existing formulas and comprehensive new aid programs to address current, but long-lasting pupil and district needs. Funds must be available on a continual basis to support programs that meet the needs of youth placed at-risk.

2. Provide children at or below the poverty line the opportunity to participate in an appropriate quality prekindergarten through grade 3 program.

   Rationale - Early childhood education programs have demonstrated that a consistent continuum of developmentally-appropriate programs, particularly for youth placed at-risk, provide for greater school success and increase the likelihood of high school graduation. It is essential to increase both the availability of such programs, including bilingual and multicultural education programs, and parent awareness of the importance of such programs as preventive measures.

3. Provide every kindergarten through grade 6 student, whose achievement is below a State reference point, the opportunity to participate in an extended school year summer program.

   Rationale - The traditional school calendar was based on the needs of an agrarian society. The United States has evolved into a technological and service-based society, but our school calendar has remained essentially unchanged. The extension of the school year is more compatible with the needs of our modern society and will provide increased learning opportunities to meet the critical needs of youth placed at-risk.

4. Provide a system that will ensure that educational professionals in New York State assigned to work with youth placed at-risk are certified and capable of working effectively with such youth. This system should provide for an appropriate supply of certified teachers and equitable distribution of certified staff to schools serving high concentrations of youth placed at-risk. A key component of this system would be the establishment of a comprehensive teacher and administrator inservice system in consultation with school boards, staff, teacher and administrator unions and higher education institutions.

   Rationale - Schools with the greatest concentrations of youth placed at-risk also tend to have the highest percentages of teachers who are not properly certified. Staff who work with youth placed at-risk are in particular need of comprehensive opportunities for staff development. Traditional instructional strategies are frequently not appropriate for teaching youth placed at-risk. Through training programs that are collaboratively planned and implemented by school boards, staff, teacher and administrator unions, and higher education institutions, staff can acquire appropriate certification and gain the skills necessary to implement strategies that have proved successful with youth placed at-risk.

5. Expand and improve a State system of facility oversight that ensures that facilities serving youth placed at-risk are safe and appropriate to the instructional needs of the students.

   Rationale - Unfortunately, a disproportionately high percentage of youth placed at-risk are attending educational programs housed in substandard facilities. The Department must play an increased role in ensuring that all students in the State attend safe, healthy and instructionally-appropriate facilities. Each public school facility outside of New York City must be inspected annually and display a Certificate of Occupancy issued annually by the Commissioner. Such a system forces districts to be constantly aware of health and safety problems and to make corrections if there are variances from standards. This system must be improved and expanded to include public school facilities in New York City.

6. Establish a base level of resources for direct instructional, pupil personnel and related services for students in buildings with high concentrations of youth placed at-risk to provide an equitable range and quality of program

and ensure that resources are allocated accordingly. The minimum level will be established through an analysis of comparable levels in other buildings in the State and through on-site resource audits.

Rationale - Research available to-date indicates that buildings with high concentrations of youth placed at-risk receive less resources at the point of instruction than other buildings in the district or in the State. These buildings should receive no less, and perhaps more, resources to enable them to provide the services required to meet the special needs of these students.

7. Establish a pilot Student Status Protection Program to assure that a school district maintains an educational service and support system for out-of-school students.

Rationale - A significant number of youth placed at-risk leave school prior to completing the requirements for high school graduation. The provision of educational support and related services to out-of-school students is needed to assist the students who are in transition back to an educational setting and to increase the likelihood of such students completing high school.

Policy C: **IT SHALL BE THE POLICY OF THE REGENTS THAT EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS, SERVICES AND STAFF MUST RESPECT AND REPRESENT THE CULTURAL, RACIAL, SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND LANGUAGE BACKGROUND OF THE STUDENT SERVED.**

Recommended actions to be taken within the next five years:

1. Undertake activities to recruit, retain and promote minority and bilingual personnel.

   Rationale - In New York State, the representation of minority students in urban areas is three times greater than the representation of minority teachers. Data show that the percentage of minorities in the teaching field has been declining while the percentage of youngsters of minority backgrounds has been rising. Increasingly, educational leaders recognize the benefits to children of experiencing people of different races and cultures in positions of leadership. All children need to see minority adults as successful role models. A comprehensive effort is required so that there will be sufficient numbers of minority and bilingual teachers to ensure that the State's teaching force reflects the cultural diversity of the State's population.

2. Increase the number of persons qualified to teach bilingual education and work as bilingual guidance counselors.

   Rationale - Current certification requirements for bilingual teachers exceed the requirements for teachers in other certification areas and the availability of preparation programs is limited. This contributes to the acute shortage of appropriately certified bilingual teachers and support personnel throughout the State. These shortages make it very difficult for school districts to provide needed and appropriate services for limited English proficient students.

3. Revise teacher pre-service and in-service policies and practices to enhance the quality of teaching at-risk students by ensuring that all educational personnel understand and respect racial and cultural diversity.

   Rationale - Numerous studies dealing with youth placed at-risk have demonstrated that a primary ingredient for improving student retention is the building of a positive self-image and expectation of success. Teachers should possess the knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable them to enhance students' self-esteem by fostering in them an understanding of and appreciation and respect for different races and cultures. Teachers should

acquire these skills and knowledge through collegiate studies, teacher center activities, and ongoing school district and State-sponsored staff development programs. School districts should ensure that observations of school staff include assessments of their abilities to promote respect for racial and cultural diversity and to enhance students' self-esteem.

4. Provide all students with instructional experiences which include the accurate study of the culture, history, and struggles by which diverse groups have sought to become full participants in American society.

   Rationale - A key component to enhancing student self-esteem is the fostering of understanding, appreciation and respect for one's own culture and the cultures of persons from different backgrounds. Effective education in a pluralistic society must include the full story of American life and the struggles of all participants. Curriculum revisions must extend beyond syllabus materials to include teacher guides that contain information not generally available in text and trade books. Using materials like the Black Perspective as models of earlier SED teacher guides, old guides need to be revised and newer guides developed.

5. Undertake a study to determine the school practices, instructional programs, administrative policies and demographic factors which have resulted in the disproportionate placement of minority students in special education, gifted and other specialized programs in some districts. Based on the results of the study, revise general education practices as necessary to reduce inappropriate referrals to and disproportionate placements in special education.

   Rationale - Inappropriate referral and placement of children in special education is primarily a result of inappropriate practices of general educators or problems with the general education system. The underlying reasons for such problems must be identified.

Policy D - **IT SHALL BE THE POLICY OF THE REGENTS TO ENSURE THAT THE SCHOOL, THE DISTRICT, THE STUDENT AND THE STATE ARE HELD ACCOUNTABLE AT THE LEVEL OF THEIR RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE ACHIEVEMENT OF YOUTH PLACED AT-RISK.**

Recommended actions to be accomplished within the next five years:

1. Establish a statewide data system to provide accurate information regarding student attendance, completion rates, achievement and retention through the full implementation of Technology Network Ties/Student Information System. The system includes a comprehensive set of applications to manage all facets of programs for students with handicapping conditions.

   Rationale - Timely, accurate and complete information is essential for making good decisions about educational policy and programs. The State Education Department's Student Information System/Decision Support Capability should include not only fiscal and staff data for each school building, but also individual student data (without violating confidentiality) which can be used for cohort analysis and aggregated quickly and inexpensively in any manner necessary for policy review.

2. Provide for disaggregation of information in a statewide data system by gender, English language proficiency, ethnicity/race and socio-economic status.

   Rationale - In order to make appropriate decisions relative to educational programs and instructional practices, decision makers (teachers, administrators, and the State Education Department) must have the computer capability to analyze data in a manner that will identify inequities of student programs and outcomes based on characteristics such as gender, ethnicity/race and socio-economic status. Disaggregating data is essential to help keep track of effective programs and practices related to the education of youth placed at-risk.

3. Develop and implement a comprehensive statewide system of accountability. This program should ensure, among other things, that school districts are effectively providing for early identification and preventive programming for youth placed at risk.

   Rationale - In order for schools to be effective in educating youth, the public education system in New York State must be accountable to its residents. The public must be fully informed on the educational

expectations and results for all students. The public must be assured that unsound educational environments and/or practices will be corrected or eliminated.

4. Establish a parent partnership (involvement) policy and program that includes procedures at the school, district and State level for parents of students in low-performing schools to gain the services necessary for their child to be successful.

Rationale - The need for active, meaningful parent partnership programs has been substantiated by research on the Head Start and High Scope programs and the work of educators such as Urie Bronfenbrenner and Burton White. Their findings validate the important role of parents as the primary teacher of their children.

With the increased recognition of the importance of involving parents in the educational process, there needs to be a State policy direction which clearly delineates the State's position of planning, implementing and evaluating parent involvement efforts. A policy statement on parent partnership (involvement) would serve as a vehicle for the development of appropriate parent involvement programs.

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